



Arab American National Museum

January 29, 2018

Testimony to the Michigan House of Representatives Tourism & Outdoor Recreation Committee

As a national institution with deep local roots, the Arab American National Museum is a strong force in tourism in metro Detroit.

The Arab American National Museum opened in May 2005. As a national institution of ACCESS, a human services agency in Dearborn, MI, we are the only museum in the country dedicated to telling the Arab American story. We offer a unique array of exhibits and programming that cannot be found anywhere else. We are proud to be one of Michigan's singular cultural attractions.

We create and host world-class exhibitions, such as our exhibit *Little Syria, NY: An Immigrant Community's Life & Legacy*, which was exhibited at the Ellis Island Museum of Immigration History in 2016-17, and our recent exhibition *Epicenter X: Saudi Contemporary Art in Dearborn, MI*, which marked the first time a show about Saudi contemporary art was exhibited anywhere in the Midwest. We bring artists and performers from around the world to the metro Detroit area. Often, these artists and performers are making their Michigan debut. Our partnership with Cinetopia, a major regional festival, brings our Arab American Film Festival to a broad audience, presenting films that otherwise would not have a venue. Our popular Yalla Eat! Culinary Walking Tours have not only attracted hundreds of food and history enthusiasts from across the region, but the program has been featured in multiple national media outlets, including NPR and *Eater*. Our Yalla Eat! culinary map helps to boost visits to the dozens of Arab American restaurants that are featured in it. The Yalla Eat! tours are also listed on the Pure Michigan website.

We are an active member of the Detroit Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau (DMCVB) and are frequently featured in their print and online promotional materials. They also send many journalists, mostly national travel writers, to our facility and to our programs throughout the year.

Because of our national reputation, as an Affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution and accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, we attract thousands of visitors from across the region and country. More than 40% of our visitors are from outside of the state of Michigan.

As a community-based museum we are in the unique position to speak to the diverse experiences of Arab Americans across the nation. Our community is made up of immigrants, refugees, and multi-generational Arab American families. Our community members can trace their ancestry to the 22 different countries of the Arab world. We are entrepreneurs, scientists, students, laborers, politicians, athletes, writers, and Hollywood celebrities. We feature all of these stories on our walls and in our programs. Because of this, we are a trusted source for information.

Our visitors tell us that they come here in part to combat the stream of mis-information and stereotypes about Arabs and Arab Americans in popular and political discourse. For example, our Yalla Eat! tours take participants into the streets of an Arab American neighborhood to sample food, meet business owners, and learn about the history of Dearborn's largest ethnic community. With so much negative coverage about Dearborn and its Arab population in the media, the tours are a chance for participants to see for themselves how vibrant the Dearborn community is. The vast majority of tour participants are non-Arab and are not from the Dearborn area.

We take our role as a community-based cultural and educational institution very seriously. We know we are not only telling the stories of our Arab American community, but we are showcasing the Dearborn and metro Detroit area to out-of-state and, often, out-of-country visitors.

Sincerely,

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